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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 MASERU 000626

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SUBJECT: LESOTHO: DIPLOMATIC PUNCHES, HUGS, AND QUESTIONS FOLLOW
LIBYAN ENVOY'S EXPULSION

REF: MASERU 621

MASERU 00000626 001.2 OF 002

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: Following revocation of the Libyan Ambassador to Lesotho's credentials (REFTEL) on December 13, both Lesotho's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and Libya's Embassy in Maseru issued statements regarding the unusual expulsion. While the GOL issued a strongly worded press release, it also included language hinting that the move had been coordinated with the Libyan government and may cause only limited damage to the bilateral Lesotho-Libyan relationship. The polite Libyan statement reinforced this impression. In the background, rumors swirl that the whole affair was caused by ties between the Libyan Ambassador and former Cabinet Member Thomas Thabane, who poses a strong challenge to Lesotho's governing party in the February 2007 national elections. END SUMMARY.

Are All Politics (and Expulsions) Local?

12. (SBU) As detailed in reftel, the credentials of Libya's Ambassador to Lesotho, Mohamed Algamudi, were revoked on December 13 (and the Libyan envoy departed Lesotho on December 17). While Maseru's pundits and local journalists have advanced various theories on this unusual expulsion, drawing on a laundry list of alleged negative personal and professional behavior attributed to Algamudi, the strongest thread remains with those now public rumors linking the affair to the Libyan Ambassador's connections with former Cabinet Member Thomas Thabane. Thabane, now leader of a fledgling opposition party, is predicted to pose a strong challenge to Lesotho's governing party in the February 2007 national elections. Such rumors led Thabane to publicly state this weekend at a political rally in Mafeteng that, while he had long been friends with Algamudi, the Libyan Ambassador had disagreed with Thabane in October over his prospective split from the governing LCD party. Thabane maintained that the Ambassador has not spoken to him thereafter.

Lesotho MFA's Muscular Statement

13. (U) On December 15, Lesotho's MFA issued the following press release:

(BEGIN TEXT)

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs wishes to make the following announcement:

Due to persistent abuse of diplomatic privileges and flagrant

violation of municipal and international law, the Government of Lesotho no longer find Libya's Ambassador to the Kingdom of Lesotho, His Excellency Mr. Mohamed Algamudi, acceptable as a person holding a diplomatic immunity appointment in this country.

Consequently, arrangements are being made by both the Governments of Lesotho and Libya to assist the Ambassador to wind up and take leave of Lesotho on Sunday 17th December, 2006.

Both Governments remain committed to strengthening further the already cordial relations existing between them.

(END TEXT)

Libya's Demure Statement

14. (U) Also on December 15, the Libyan Embassy in Maseru released a statement to Maseru's diplomatic community, which included the following language on the departure of Ambassador Algamudi:

(BEGIN TEXT)

The Libyan People's Bureau of the Great Socialist Libyan Arab Jamahiriya~.. has the honor to inform them that Mr. Mohamed F. Algamudi, the Ambassador of the Libyan People's Bureau, will be going home.

Mr. Abdulali H. I. Fadlallah, the Assistant Secretary for Cooperation, will be the acting Charge d' Affaires [sic] ad interim.

(END TEXT)

Relations Intact... Thabane Backed?

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15. (SBU) COMMENT: While the MFA statement regarding Ambassador Algamudi was strong, the positive language about Lesotho-Libyan relations and Libya's placid response seem to indicate minimal collateral damage inflicted to the bilateral relationship. However, the real emerging story may prove to lie in how far the Government of Lesotho will go to demonstrate ties between the Libyans and Thomas Thabane, who it perceives as perhaps the most capable and threatening political adversary in the upcoming national elections. In one of several recent examples of the latter, on December 17, authorities detained a bodyguard of Thabane on suspicion of illegal firearm possession. Although the individual was released after producing a valid permit, Thabane's ABC party perceived the move as political harassment.
END COMMENT.

PERRY
MURPHY